United States Environmental Protection Agency

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EPA'S TARGETED WATERSHED GRANTS 2005 ANNUAL REPORT

December 2005

Bear River

UT, ID, WY

WHY IS THIS WATERSHED SPECIAL?

The 7,500-square-mile Bear River watershed begins in the high country of Utah and flows north and west through southwest Wyoming and southeast Idaho. After abruptly turning to the south, the Bear River returns to Utah and eventually ends its journey as the largest tributary of the Great Salt Lake. The Conservation Corridor connecting the northern and southern Rockies is a critical pathway for migratory birds. Surrounded by arid desert lands, the Bear River marshes provide for an abundance of bird life with over 200 waterfowl and other bird species. Currently, 52 streams and nine lakes are listed as being impaired in the three states of the watershed.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

Water quality management is compounded by the transboundary nature of the river, which meanders through three states and two EPA regions with multiple jurisdictions and planning authorities.

- Water quality problems include sediment, nutrients, fecal coliform bacteria, low dissolved oxygen, and high water temperature.
- Pollutant sources include animal feeding operations, grazing, agriculture, wastewater treatment, degraded stream banks, urban development, roads, phosphate mining, oil and gas exploration, and logging.

A late summer sunrise over the Bear Lake Marina. Bear Lake is the recreational gem of the watershed and provides opportunities from boating and camping to ice fishing.

RESTORATION ACTIVITIES

The Bear River Commission will use grant funds to develop and demonstrate:

- An integrated Watershed Information System (WIS)—www.bearriverinfo.org—to facilitate "one stop shopping" for data collection, data analysis, information transfer, and public outreach
- A water quality trading program to allow point and nonpoint pollutant sources to trade water quality credits
- Dynamic water quality modeling to support water quality trading and analysis of potential water quality management scenarios

Project participants examine a restoration site.

A STRONG PARTNERSHIP FOR CHANGE

The Bear River Commission is working with the Bear River Water Quality Steering Committee, a group composed of the water quality agency specialists from Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming. The project has broad-based participation from many partners, including:

- Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming Departments of Environmental Quality
- Bear River Commission
- Bear Lake Regional Committee
- Bear Lake Watch
- Utah State University
- Utah Water Research Laboratory
- Bear River Water Quality Task Force

Project personnel scope out potential sites for real time streamflow and water quality monitoring.

"The Bear River Watershed Information System is providing unprecedented access to data in the Bear River Basin."

– Jeff Horsburgh, Utah Water Research Laboratory, Utah State University, a Project Leader

Targeted Watersheds